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Autor: Steinemann, Nelly
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Health Corner

My Missus thinks I need a checkup, Doc

Doctor: Good idea to have a look at your health Jim. Anything that's particularly worrying you?

Patient: Not really, it's just that some of our friends dropped dead recently, others developed nasty cancers. There must be something we can do to stop these things happening.

And is your wife concerned at all about your health?

I don't think she is – well I don't quite have the energy I used to, if you know what I mean, but that does not seem to worry her. She has just had her woman's check, my BMW has had the once over, so she says it's time for me now.

So your energy is not quite what you would like it to be?

Of course not – I work 12 hours a day in a cut throat business, have a big property to maintain, two demanding teenagers and an elderly mother who rings every five minutes.

Sounds a lot for one person and yet this is not uncommon. What do you do to relax?

Nothing beats a sip of whisky at night to wind down.

How many is that?

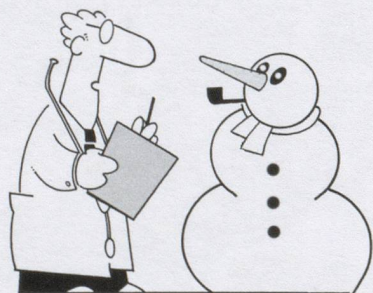
Noticed my belly? Actually it's not just the alcohol – it's because of YOU. Since I stopped smoking, I have put on 10kg. To be honest, I am still glad I did give up – that cough has gone.

Great, that's one of the best things you could do for your health! Weight is an issue, but smoking is far more damaging than a few extra kilos. Are you physically active?

You are talking about gym? No thanks. Used to play golf, no time now.

How's your diet? Do you ..

...Excuse me for interrupting Doc, I



Stop drinking, quit smoking, move around more and eat that carrot

came for a checkup, not to be told to drink less, eat less, stress less, exercise more – my wife does that. I want everything checked, blood, XRs, scans, the lot. Can you arrange?

When it comes to checkups, one size does not fit all. I see that your father passed away in his early 60s. Do you know what he died of?

I do indeed - the old man had angina from when he was 55, they did a bypass before his 60th birthday, but he still managed to have a massive heart attack whilst he was out on a job. Very sad that he could not enjoy his retirement.

Any others in the family who had early heart attacks / strokes?

Oh yes, his younger brother had a heart attack at 50. He is alive still, must be in his late 70s by now.

It would be a good idea to look into your heart health a bit more. I see your blood pressure has always been good. Your cholesterol has been a bit up in the past. And you are in that 'grey' area of pre-diabetes. All these are risk factors for your heart and your heart might be older than your 50 years.

So I need an ECG, right?

An ECG does not help us much in your situation. You may want to see a heart specialist for some more specific investigations. I would need to refer you in private for these tests, as the hospital does not have the capacity. In any case, there are many lifestyle modifications that definitely will reduce your risk – mainly regular exercise, healthy eating, cutting down a bit on your weight.

I will think about the lifestyle thing. Please give me a referral for these heart checks. My insurance should pay for that. But how can I make sure I don't have a cancer looming somewhere? NZ is so behind. Other countries do a whole body scan, then you know.

Interestingly, studies show that people who have had these scans do not live longer, or are healthier or happier, only poorer – because the tests are costly.

Surely it can't do any harm to check?

Actually it can. Doing scans of 'everything' often shows tumours which are not a threat to your health, but we cannot tell, so you end up having biopsies, operations, sometimes with

major complications – you can 'die of the cancer you don't even have'.

The wife says men need a prostate check though.

That's talked about a lot. Any cancers in your immediate family?

None as far as I know.

Do you have any symptoms from your prostate? Like a slow stream, stop and start, getting up several times at night, dribbling?

I cannot water the flowers from far away now, but other than that, no. But I still want that blood test.

The New Zealand guidelines do recommend a rectal examination as well at your age. Interestingly, America does not support any prostate screening in healthy men without risk factors.

That's amazing, with all the litigation they have there.

They think the risk of doing harm is larger than the benefit. Although many men die of prostate cancer, many live with it. By treating them all, some can be harmed – there can be complications of treatment. The first ones that come to my mind are impotence and incontinence.

I would not fancy that either. We leave it.

I like to follow the New Zealand guidelines. It's me now talking about litigation!

OK if you insist. Can you now give me the form for every blood test you can think of?

There really is no benefit for you if I tick every single box. We'll do cholesterol, diabetes, and PSA, the prostate check.

I better move on. Do I pay for this consultation? You really did not offer me what I had requested.

... beg your pardon...

...Just joking, I think I get it. Today is the first day of my lifestyle changes. The Missus will be impressed!

Let's get together once we have the results and make a personalised plan!

No need, I can do it, stubborn, as my wife says.

Before you go, there is one test I very much recommend from 45 on. That's a glaucoma check, done by your optometrist. Glaucoma leads to blindness. You have no symptoms until it is too late and a lot can be done to prevent the damage.

Good you reminded me thanks Doc. You did a lot for me today!

By Nelly Steinemann